

Gill emphasising that the supposedly Amerindian discrete cranial traits may in fact prove to exist elsewhere, as analyses are expanded to other areas of the Pacific and beyond. Similarly, John Flenley and myself are happy to incorporate not only David Steadman's data of faunal extinction but also McCall's "Little Ice Age hypothesis" into the model of environmental destruction.

The crucial problem which remains—and which must become a top priority for organisers of the next conference—is that of the need for translation into Spanish. This was already noted in Laramie (RNJ 7 (3), p. 45), but since simultaneous translation is prohibitively expensive, and since no registrants ticked the relevant box on the application form, nothing was done this time—with the result that, once again, the islanders present could understand little of what was being said, and some felt slighted and ignored. Once again, the conference was about them, not for them.

If simultaneous translation proves too expensive the next time, some other solution will be needed—such as allowing five minutes at the end of each presentation for a summary to be read in Spanish (or in English for papers in Spanish). It was also widely felt that questions and discussion should occur after each paper rather than be delayed till the end of a full session. This might entail longer slots for each paper, and/or more concurrent sessions—but not necessarily. On the basis of both Laramie and Albuquerque, I would suggest that papers could easily be limited to a 15 minute presentation—after all, one should be able to convey the gist of a problem and of one's results in that time, bearing in mind that the audience are not all specialists and are not interested in minutiae and detailed figures, which can be left to the published version.

Several papers at Albuquerque were intensely boring for this very reason, and should have been simplified, shortened or actually turned down. Session organisers could perhaps be more ruthless in future admissions, maintaining academic excellence without sacrificing general interest. There is certainly a case to be made for a more rigorous selection procedure which would, for example, have weeded out the unedifying and sycophantic hagiography that was presented on the last morning and which contributed nothing to a supposedly scientific conference.

In short, we need good papers which are relevant and new; we need speakers who do not put everyone to sleep (in my opinion, papers should never be read out if this can be avoided); but above all, we need some means of making future meetings bilingual in order fully to integrate and honour, and to avoid alienating, the inhabitants of the island which lies at the centre of our enterprise and our endeavours.

This was the last such conference of the century, but these events have already become a tradition, and will certainly continue well into the next century, as the spirit of international scholarly cooperation and multidisciplinary debate that makes them so enjoyable and valuable is maintained and expanded. ■

Letters to the Editor



Dear Editor,

I would like to respond to the International News item

that you included in the June RNJ (Vol. 11, 2) regarding the Christies' sale of the van Lier collection. First of all, as a serious private collector of Polynesian art in the United States, I would like to correct some items in this report. To start with, the van Lier collection did have some wonderful objects but the strength was in the New Guinea and related material and certainly not in the Polynesian objects. The Easter Island material in his collection was very late and was nothing more than island trade curios of the last 19th and 20th century—and decadent at best. If the pieces had been of the 18th or early 19th century, the figural sculpture would have attracted serious interest and brought in excess of well over \$100,000 each. But instead these pieces were purchased by new collectors or novices who had not carefully studied the material culture of Easter Island. The staff, which sold for the reported \$1,200, was of this late curio period; had it been an authentic object of the late 18th or early 19th century it would have sold in excess of \$50,000.

The Solomon Islands' shield again had problems in the respect that it may be the last one to ever come on the market, hence the \$180,000 price, but it attracted very little support from the European and American trade as it was, in the opinion of most knowledgeable experts, a rather weak example and certainly the most uninteresting of the known surviving pieces as to iconography and inlay form.

In my opinion, one of the few truly Oceanic-related masterworks in the sale was the superb Dyak bowl, representing the best in Dyak art. This piece sold for many times its high estimate and was sold to a well-known Austrian collector with great taste.

In your report it is stated that "never before have such prices been paid for ethnographic treasures." This is false: Christies, Sothebys, Phillips, and Bonhams have sold Oceanic objects for considerably more money than the items in the van Lier collection.

In closing, I would like to say that traditional objects from Polynesia are very rare and when excellent examples appear on the market (which is very seldom these days) the prices continue to escalate. For example, a really great *moai kavakava* of the 18th century would bring well over \$300,000 today. At the peak of the market in 1990/1991, a *rapa* paddle from Easter Island was sold to a private French collector for the equivalent of \$440,000. So the objects and prices in the van Lier collection were, for the most part, not so great after all!

Mark Blackburn, Hilo, Hawaii.



Dear Editor,

Jo Anne Van Tilburg adds another important contribution to how the giant stone statues of Easter Island were transported, as reported in RNJ 10(4), 1996. I have a few questions, however. Van Tilburg states that, in her computer simulation, statue 01/53 ("reference *moai*") was moved in a supine position on a "simple sledge" constructed of two nonparallel wood beams (logs), 5 meters long and 10 cm in diameter. It appears to me that a much larger log than 10 cm diameter would be required to move the ten ton *moai*. She states, "The beams which add no appreciable weight to the transport task are held in place by the weight of the statue

alone." Why would the two large beams be so described when they are large enough to be runners of the sledge? There is no binding affixing the *moai* to the beams. Without binding together the two essential elements, the *moai* and the sledge, no forward movement could be made. The two nonparallel beams would only be pulled out from under the *moai*. It is possible to improve upon the sledge by adapting the following: abandon the nonparallel beams; move them to a parallel position wide enough to support the statue. The beams will be the runners for the sledge which is now ready to be pulled to its destination.

Another question concerns the supine position of the statue, and bringing it to the back of the *ahu* at Akivi. Akivi is one of the very few *ahu* that could possibly take a statue from its back side. Nearly all other *ahu* have high stone sea walls, many meters in height (Vinapu, Ra'ai, Heki'i, Anakena, Tongariki, etc.) and several of these are directly on the coastal rocks. It would not be possible to raise a statue on them from the back. Thus her "reference" *moai* is poorly selected if she wants to show how a typical statue could be raised.

Robert R. Koll, Ajijic, Mexico

Dear Editor,

The Russian ethnologist, Irina K. Fedorova (RNJ 10:57-9; 1996b; 1997) has interpreted the *rongorongo* inscriptions on the sheet by the native Tomenika, on the Madrid fish figurine, on the New York birdman figure, and on three fragments of the Tahua tablet as "records of magic agricultural formulae" (RNJ 9:73-6). All the translated texts are too similar and do not contain the names of the deities Haua and Makemake nor of the other deities connected with the agricultural cult. Moreover, there are no mythological features in these texts. A new point of view does not coincide with the previous interpretation. Dr Fedorova has read two glyphs as [tarō] vai, [tarō] rapa (the two varieties) in the Tahua record (Ab 6); on the other hand, the same glyphs have been read as the ghost's name, Vai Rapa "The Bright Water" on a *moai pa'apa'a* figure (Fedorova 1982:39). I believe that the obtained results witness that the reconstructed ancient culture differs radically from the authentic Easter Island one.

Now I would like to mention my view on the *rongorongo*. I use my personal classification and reading of the glyphs (Rjabchikov 1987:362-3; 1993:23). The sun god Makemake is represented as a mask or face in Easter Island rock art (Métraux 1940:313), and the term *mata* (face/eyes) is presented in the place names Mataveri and Mata Ngarau, associated with the birdman cult (Rjabchikov 1996a:142). So it is natural to find the big-eyed glyph 60 (*mata* (face/eyes) as the first of the string of hieroglyphs engraved on the breast of

the birdman figure known as text X. Besides, the two big-eyed images were distinguished in the string figure *Mata nui, Mata iti* (Rjabchikov 1996b:17). Then in text X, the two frigate birds 44 *Taha* are depicted as a separate fragment, and the vulvaform glyph 1 *Tiki* also precedes the other signs in another separate fragment (Rjabchikov 1996c:27). These records correspond to a *Tahua* tablet's inscription (Rjabchikov 1987:361, 365). The Atan manuscript (Heyerdahl 1965, fig.114) contains, in particular, two glyphs with the native Marama's reading as *ko koro e rere tau raa* 'The feast of the sunrise' (Kondratov 1965:413). Indeed, these glyphs read 62 44 *Too Taha* 'Makemake takes', hence it is a variant of the archaic magic formula 'Take for Haua, for Makemake' for cooking of food (Métraux 1940:313). The two segments of the Santiago staff have the similar sense. The first line of the staff includes the glyphs 62 1 62 61 *Too Tiki too Hina* 'Tiki

(Makemake) takes, Hina (Haua) takes', and the third line has the following: 21 29 25 *koru hua*, (compare Margarevean *akakorukoru* 'to fill the mouth up entirely with food' and Rapanui *hua* 'fruit', and nearby there are the words 62 64 102 4 63 *Too Mea atua kapa* 'The god Makemake (lit. The Red-the-god-the Bird (*Kapakapa* takes')'. Again one can try to study the Atan manuscript with Marama's readings (Heyerdahl 1965:fig 116): there are three glyphs denoting the expression *e vekeveke korua* 'two dragonflies' (Kondratov 1965:414); this translation resulted from consideration of the modern Rapanui vocabulary. These glyphs read 6-44 25 *hata hua* 'a fruit grows' (compare Maori *whata* 'to elevate') and are a symbol of plant growth. Actually Rapanui *vekeveke* signifies 'banana flower' and *korua* corresponds to Mangareva *akakorukoru*. The successful interpretation of Marama's list bears a resemblance to the natives' reports (Routledge 1919:252-3): "the words

were new, but the letters were old" [Tomenika] and the "same picture, but other words" [Kopiera].

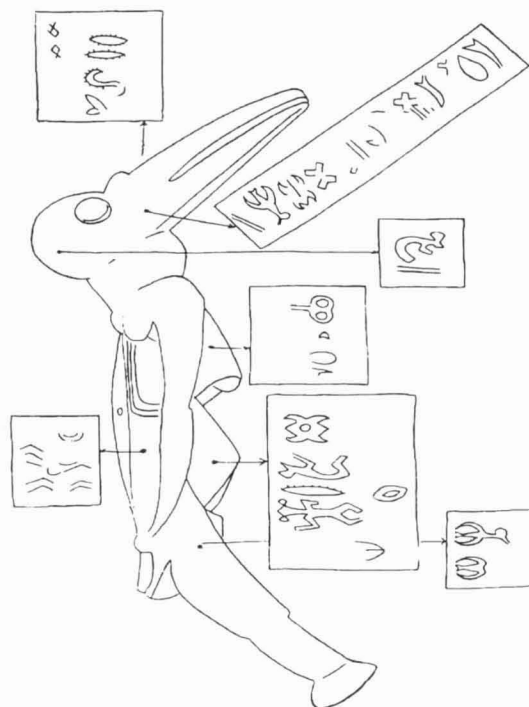
So my decipherment correlates with the Rapanui beliefs. I insist that only the formal analysis of the texts can give correct results. The main mistake of Dr Fedorova as well as my other opponents is the using of the so-called "readings" of an Easter Islander, Metoro, as a base of the decipherment of the mysterious writing.

Sergei V. Rjabchikov, Krasnodar, Russia

¹ I think the "phallus" glyphs 102 were inserted in the original texts during the copyings, as special "magic" symbols.

References

- Fedorova, I. K. 1982. Issledovanie rapanuyskikh textov. Y. V. Knorozov, ed. *Zabytye sistemy pis'ma*. Moscow, Nauka; 23-98
Fedorova, I. K. 1995. Tomenika's Text. RNJ 9:73-6.



The New York birdman figure

- Fedorova, I. K. 1996a [Translation of the text of the Madrid fish tablet, "Ika"] in Mellen Blanco, F., 1996. A Fish (*Ika*) with Hieroglyphic Writing from Isla de Pascua discovered in Madrid. *RNI* 10:57-9.
- Fedorova, I. K. 1996b. Polinezijsky mir v textakh kohau rongorongo. In: V. P. Nikolaev, ed. *Tikhookeansky put' razvitiya: kontseptsiya i real'nost'*. *Tezisy XXII nauchnoy konferentsii po izucheniyu Avstralii i Okeanii*. Moscow, Institut Vostokovedeniya RAN, 79-82.
- Fedorova, I. K. 1997. Otrazhenie obryakovykh deystviy na stranitsakh kohau rongorongo. In V. P. Nikolaev, ed. *Strany Yuzhnykh morey: proshloe i sovremennost'*. *Tezisy dokladov XXIII nauchnoy konferentsii po izucheniyu Avstralii i Okeanii*. Moscow: Institute Vostokovedeniya RAN, p. 85-8.
- Heyerdahl T. 1965. *Reports of the Norwegian Archaeological Expedition to Easter Island and the East Pacific* Vol. 2.
- Kondratov, A. M. 1965. The Hieroglyphs Signs and Different Lists in the Manuscripts from Easter Island, in Heyerdahl, T., et al. 1965. *Miscellaneous Papers: Reports of the Norwegian Archaeological Expedition to Easter Island and the East Pacific*. Vol. 2. Rand McNally and Company.
- Métraux, A. 1940. *Ethnology of Easter Island*. Bishop Museum Bulletin 160. Honolulu.
- Rjabchikov, S.V. 1987. Progress Report on the Decipherment of the Easter Island Writing System. *Journal of the Polynesian Society* 96:361-7.
- Rjabchikov, S.V. 1993. Notes on the Easter Island Script. *L'Echo de Rapa Nui* 24:22-3.
- Rjabchikov, S.V. 1996a. Toponimy ostrova Paskhi, svyazannye s kul'tom pitsecheloveka. In V.I. Tkhorik, ed. *Otnositel'nost' abstraktnykh realiy yazyka*. Krasnodar, Kuban State University, 141-4.
- Rjabchikov, S.V. 1996b. *Rongorongo versus kai-kai*: a look at parallel themes in Easter Island's mysterious script and string figure repertoire. *Bulletin of the International String Figure Association* 3: 14-20.
- Rjabchikov, S.V. 1996c. *Tayny ostrova Paskhi*, vol. 5. Krasnodar: Torgovo-promyshlennaya palata Krasnodarskogo kraia.
- Routledge, K. 1919. *The Mystery of Easter Island*. Hazell, Watson & Viney, London.

REVIEWS

A review of two French productions about Rapanui
by Grant McCall
University of New South Wales

- ☉ *Easter Island. The interactive discovery of a legendary island*
Paris, Les Éditions numériques, 1996. FF 149
and

- 📖 Corinne Raybaud. *L'île de Pâques de 1862 à 1888, 26 années de Diaspora Pascuane en Océanie Orientale*
Collection Mémoire du Pacifique. 1996. Papeete, Editions JCR. PPF 2950

Imagine seeing Kiko on your computer screen, or Mundo Edwards speaking French, or photographs of houses, gardens and so on; all from Rapanui and all on a CD ROM, the newest publishing technology.

We are used to viewing encyclopaedias of varying qual-

ity, dictionaries and other reference works on CD ROM, even novels and, of course, the ubiquitous games. But a CD ROM on the Pacific? That's unusual!

Juniper Films (Sydney) published last year the very attractive *Pacifica: A cultural voyage*, which is a companion to their television series (now video collection) and book. It contains a game to grab student interest and a variety of video clips, derived from the videos. But a CD on a single island? I believe that Rapanui has the honour to be the first Pacific Island to have a CD entirely to itself, and a very stylish, versatile product it is too. The disk itself is a "hybrid", which means you can pop it into the CD ROM drive of most Windows or Macintosh computers and it will play. As well, the text, whilst based in French, appears in Spanish and English as well, with the narration automatically coming in those languages.

Readers of the *Rapa Nui Journal* will find nothing new to them in this reference work, but it is attractively packaged. We know Esperanza Pakarati, but now we can see her sing, and "la la" a couple of old Rapanui words her mother (Amelia Tepano) taught her, but she has forgotten. There is a section on common words in Rapanui, spoken also by Esperanza.

There are remarkably few errors on the disk, given its considerable complexity. The map calls a "hanga" a "hargá", but we know what it is. Whilst the images and information are authentic, for some reason the French authors have chosen Tamare music instead of Rapanui for some bridging bits. Too bad.

The disk is devised into three sections: Historical background, Exploration (the main sites) and Discovery. The latter section looks at life on the island today and includes some tourism and travel information. All the main sections are illustrated.

In the "Discovery" section, there are four sections, the first being "Life on the island" with high quality photographs, the story of the *toromiro* and short photographic essays on gardens and houses. Here is where the Rapanui language section is located along with a mysterious "Ceremonial music" presentation which is somewhat discordant. The section closes with "practical information", including a multi-lingual bibliography.

Anyone interested in Rapanui will find this French product a treat and a joy: Les Éditions Numériques are to be congratulated for the high standard of graphic design and reproduction. Further details may be obtained by visiting their website: <<http://www.lvi-press.com>>. My copy was only FF198, including postage to Australia, which is very reasonable for such a diverse quality product.

Corinne Raybaud's *L'île sacrifiée*, however, is not a quality product in terms of its production. I was unable to purchase a copy from the publishers in Tahiti, and resorted to that excellent mail order source for French material on the Pacific, Jean-Louis Boglio, in Australia. According to Boglio, each copy of *L'île sacrifiée* is pasted together slightly differently and with a slightly different cut of the paper. One of the two illustrations appears on the cover and between pages 72 and 73; the other is between pages 148 and 149. Both seem to have been done with a photocopier and are contemporary photographs of Rapanui young men in full dance paint. There